



**Place, Memory and the British High Rise Experience:  
negotiating social change on the Wyndford Estate, 1962-  
2015**

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*Introduction*

In recent years, Britain’s deepening housing crisis has stimulated renewed professional and journalistic interest in the legacies of Britain’s post-war ‘high rise revolution’.<sup>1</sup> Despite this, however, negative perceptions of the multi-storey flat have proven remarkably resilient within the British public imagination. While the Grenfell Tower fire of June 2017 provoked intense speculation upon Britain’s wealth ‘apartheid’, reactions to the disaster also replenished some long-established myths.<sup>2</sup> According to Richard Pendlebury, the ‘Grenfell Tower inferno’ was merely the ‘latest tragedy in the troubled history of British multi-storey living’. While Britain’s multi-storey revolution aimed to bring ‘futuristic home comforts to former slum-dwellers and Blitz survivors’, in reality ‘blocks resembled factories’, the design of which impeded ‘regrowth of uprooted communities’ and fostered ‘anti-social behaviour and crime’.<sup>3</sup> Writing in the *Mail on Sunday*, Peter Hitchens was more trenchant still:

The common sense of the residents of Grenfell Tower was greater than those who built it and ran it. It should, obviously, never have been built in the first place. People should live in houses with gardens, not in supersized filing cabinets in the sky. There is no better symbol of urban blight in Europe and America than the high rise block of flats...they will always be a rather insulting way of meeting housing targets, without giving people real homes.<sup>4</sup>

This article contributes to the ongoing historiographical reassessment of British council housing via re-examination of its most criticised post-1945 component: the high rise estate.<sup>5</sup> While it was certainly true that some flatted estates experienced technical and administrative problems early in their lifespan, the malign status of multi-storey housing within popular memory also owes something to its deep inscription by wider narratives of ‘urban crisis’ and modernist ‘failure’ originating in the early 1970s.<sup>6</sup> As Otto Saumarez Smith observes, the concept of the ‘inner city’ became during this period ‘a spatially materialised locus for all that was perceived to have gone wrong with Britain’s state and society in the post-war period’.<sup>7</sup> This was due, not only to the physical and visible concentration of contentious post-war problems within inner-city locations, but to the symbolic function of the ‘inner-city’ as ‘a place where feelings of disillusion about modernism merged with widespread concerns about the perceived failure of Britain’s social democratic project’.<sup>8</sup>

During a moment of accelerating economic, social and political change, the ‘towerblock’ here emerged as a prominent site of ideological contestation, onto which diverse actors projected competing narratives of post-war failure and opposing visions of redemption. Thus, for critics on the left, multi-storey housing symbolised the corrosive influence of capitalist imperatives within the field of public housing provision, together with ongoing neglect of the needs, desires and rights of the urban poor; for critics on the right, the same architectural form signified the subjugation of the individual by the state, economic failure, and the collapse of law and order.<sup>9</sup> Common to both perspectives, was the assumption that multi-storey housing embodied inherent flaws which stemmed from its design and construction, and which resulted inevitably in urban decay and societal disintegration. In this respect, as Patrick Wright observed, the ‘towerblock’ has become a leitmotif for the failure of the whole post-war reformist agenda, the ‘tombstone not just of council housing but of the entire welfare state’.<sup>10</sup>

From a historical standpoint, this ‘design failure’ thesis is problematic in several respects. While a fundamental asymmetry certainly obtained between state and tenant in the design and management of flatted estates, design failure arguments nevertheless mobilise a highly generalised view of the ‘top-down’ welfare state, in which centralised state power is equated with the negation of agency ‘from below’. Consequently, the British high rise experience is often framed in terms of victimhood, obscuring, not only variation between estates, but the ways in which estates were implicated in, and served as sites for, the production and performance of identities and belongings. As a recent study of the Heygate Estate in Southwark thus observes, design failure arguments glide over ‘the complexities and diversities of life in a specific local place’, subsuming ‘heterogeneous working-class, inner-city districts into a single, all-encompassing notion of ‘problem places’’.<sup>11</sup>

Intended as a corrective to the top-down perspective from which dominant accounts of multi-storey living are narrated, this article employs a case study approach to investigate the complexities of ‘everyday life’ on the Wyndford Estate in Maryhill, north Glasgow. Combining reanalysis of survey return sheets collected as part of Pearl Jephcott’s 1971 *Homes in High Flats*<sup>12</sup> study with fresh oral histories collected in 2015, it uses personal narratives as sources for analysing the everyday transactions, values and feelings of residents. Where dominant

accounts of the high rise experience stress the inevitability of social disintegration, a micro-historical perspective trained on residents’ subjectivities draws attention to the complex nature of social and emotional life on the Wyndford Estate and the wider historical processes shaping its evolution. Contrary to the view of contemporary experts, we argue in the first part of the article that community life was in fact re-created on the Wyndford Estate during its early years, albeit in a way that reflected the growing post-war importance of privacy and personal autonomy in shaping residents’ use and evaluation of domestic space. In this regard, neighbourly relations on high rise estates mirrored wider trends whereby post-war economic and residential change transformed the nature of community life without destroying it, expanding the possibilities for more voluntaristic and personalised forms of social relationship without obliterating everyday connectivities and solidarities.<sup>13</sup> In turn, the second section argues that long-run ‘decline’ was contingent upon multiple factors, as opposed to being a simple function of ‘design failure’. Through attention to the ‘dynamic interconnections’ between everyday life and wider forces of change,<sup>14</sup> the article demonstrates how residents’ changing perceptions of their estate were shaped, not only by design features, but by shifting policy objectives, population processes, cultural stigmatisation, and economic re-structuring.

Additionally, the article pays special attention to the ways in which memory is implicated in the production of place. As the historical geographer Doreen Massey has observed in an influential article,

The identity of places is very much bound up with the *histories* which are told of them, *how* those histories are told, and which may turn out to be dominant.<sup>15</sup>

Within British popular memory, the history of the high rise estate has been told as a story of inevitable failure and social disintegration, and one of the ways in which oral testimony might complicate this narrative is through the recovery of submerged histories which reveal the complexities of everyday life and the contingencies of historical process.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, however, retrospective testimonies also supply access to the stories which residents tell about their estate, and through this, to the processes by which they mobilise competing versions of the past to construct a liveable sense of place in the present. As well as recovering marginalised aspects of everyday life, the article explores how long-term residents situate themselves within and against a distinctive collective memory of residential ‘decline’ as a means of negotiating

major changes in their estate's composition, governance and reputation over the period. What this focus on residents' memory work here suggests is that, while changes in the estate's population profile has undermined communal self-perceptions of the 'respectability' of the estate, retrospective narration of the process of change represents one means by which residents make sense of and manage its subjective effects. Memories of place are thus records of the subjective impact of destabilising change, but also of the imaginative and unconscious processes by which residentially immobile tenants adapt to instability through reshaping the past in accordance with present emotional needs. As such, against notions of passivity and victimhood, they point to the agency of residents in shaping the meanings of their estate as 'home', and to the need for more nuanced historical assessment of the lived complexities of the British high rise experience.

### *Modernity, Respectability and Neighbourly Relations: Wyndford 1967-68*

In both popular and academic representations of flatted estates the experiential context in which post-war demand for new flatted homes was formulated is sometimes forgotten. Where images of corporate greed and political corruption have been important in shaping cultural remembrance of the 1960's production drive, the experience of daily life in a Victorian slum has tended to slip from public view.<sup>17</sup> In post-war Glasgow, however, then possessing the highest density of slums in the UK, the dire housing conditions under which the larger share of the population lived formed the single most important theme within public debates on the city's reconstruction in the 25 years after WWII. For the city's working classes, some 50,000 of whom were multi-storey dwellers by 1970, the high rise production drive of the 1960s held out the possibility of a long-awaited transformation in domestic living standards: where 44% of the city's population still lived in overcrowded tenement dwellings in 1951, with over 50% of households lacking a private WC, multi-storey flats were hailed as the archetypal modern living space, equipped as-standard with running water, internal bathrooms, fitted kitchens and a range of other 'amenities' usually lacking in pre-1914 tenement housing.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, municipal publications and local press reports framed Glasgow's multi-storey drive as a technological domestic revolution. Tenants' hand-books, for example, informed new flat-dwellers that:

Your new house can truly be called **Modern**, in every sense of the term. Many up to date improvements and appliances have been embodied in the design and construction. The wasteful coal fire with its attendant dirt and smoke nuisances, as a source of space heating and hot water

supply, has been eliminated and replaced with a modern heating system, operated by Electricity or Gas supply, designed to give continuous warmth throughout your house and to provide a constant and adequate supply of hot water 24 hours per day, at a very economical cost.<sup>19</sup>

Built between 1961 and 69, dwellings on the Wyndford estate exemplified this vision of technological domesticity. Sited on the grounds of a disused army barracks in the inner-city district of Maryhill, the estate was developed by the Scottish Special Housing Association in close consultation with the Department of Health for Scotland as a flagship attempt to modernize the area's decaying residential fabric.<sup>20</sup> Where this had been condemned as 'obsolete and overcrowded' in 1960, dwellings on the new development combined enlarged spatial dimensions with functionally-differentiated living areas,<sup>21</sup> and provided an array of new 'amenities' and 'conveniences' intended to promote domestic efficiency, physical comfort and home-centred lifestyles. Where many Maryhill tenements still lacked lavatories, washing facilities, and even running water, right up to the 1980s, dwellings at Wyndford incorporated all these elements within the flat, together with off-peak electric heating, large windows to maximize light absorption, and ceiling-level extractor grilles above the WC, cooker, sink and drying cabinet. As this latter innovation implies, where tenements were often poorly aerated and riddled with damp, with the communal back-court serving as an all-purpose disposal area, multi-storey dwellings were serviced by a complex network of refuse disposal chutes and ventilation shafts, designed to ensure the hygienic control of household waste and the circulation of fetid air.





**Figure 1:** 26-storey Daleside blocks at Wyndford Road under construction, late 1960s.<sup>22</sup>

Newly arrived tenants' responded positively to many of the modernising norms embodied in these technological innovations. Indeed, for many residents, the majority of whom had lived previously in Victorian tenements, survey questions concerning the interior of their new dwellings elicited a common narrative of housing improvement in which the amenities and spatial dimensions of their 'modern' flats were positively contrasted with prior living conditions. Mrs Johnstone, for example, moved to Wyndford in 1966 from Carding Lane in Anderson, a central slum district where 'they are pulling down all the buildings for redevelopment'. Having lived previously in a 1-bedroom dwelling in a crumbling tenement, Mrs Johnstone liked her new flat 'very much': 'Everything is so nice. The bathroom and kitchen is so nice. Before we had an outside toilet, it makes such a difference'.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Mrs Robertson, a 36 year old working mother of one, drew a distinction between old and new, favourably comparing the internal layout and self-containment of her modern flat on the thirteenth floor with the noise, cramped conditions and insecurity associated with 'the last house':

I like the house. I like the glass panels between the kitchen and living room as you can see what's going on in the living room and watch the television. Good cupboard space which is a big improvement on the last house. I have no dislikes. It's quiet, if someone is having a party it doesn't bother you, as you don't hear much noise...In the tenement you were a prisoner in your own house, being on the ground floor you were afraid the house would get broken into. You feel safe up here.<sup>24</sup>

Such perceptions are suggestive of how the 'modern' innovations of the multi-storey flat resonated with residents' desires for more comfortable domestic interiors and home-centred lifestyles. As Mrs Robertson's references to 'noise' imply, however, the meanings of technological innovation were not solely reducible to themes of improved efficiency and physical comfort, but also concerned how the design of flats mediated relations between neighbours. As Mathew Hollow has here observed, where the cellular organisation of multi-storey housing is often associated with atomisation and social isolation, by the 1960s earlier sociological critiques concerning the excessively home-centred lifestyles engendered on suburban estates had begun to influence the design and layout of flatted estates.<sup>25</sup> At Wyndford, such concerns were reflected in a conscious effort to counter-balance themes of privacy and self-containment with those of communal interaction and responsibility. At one level, this was expressed in designers' intention to 'bring together the generations' on the estate.<sup>26</sup> Not only were two primary schools included within the development, but dwellings within different blocks were constructed according to different scales and specifications in order to accommodate the needs of different households. In the twenty-six storey blocks, in particular, which were intended for older residents, each floor housed four two-apartment dwellings and two one-apartment dwellings, the latter interposed between the larger flats on either side. This arrangement, together with the inclusion of a communal circulation area and shared balconies linking the flats, was designed to 'combat the loneliness of single persons living alone' and to 'encourage neighbourliness and develop a tenant's feelings of identity with a small group'.<sup>27</sup>

More generally, efforts to encourage sociability at Wyndford were pursued through the selective retention of aspects of tenement life popularly associated with working class communal cohesiveness. If dwellings were serviced by a network of refuse disposal chutes, for example, SSHA tenant agreements still obligated residents to maintain the cleanliness of communal areas, just as they had been responsible for the maintenance of the stairs, communal toilets and washing facilities within Glasgow's tenement system.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, the layout of



space beyond the block was also organised so as to encourage a sense of communal identity. As well as retention of the old barracks boundary wall, a feature designed to integrate the estate with 'the older community outside' while fostering a sense of internal cohesion, Wyndford's layout was structured around a system of internal courtyards and landscaped areas, encompassing seats, intersecting footpaths, play areas and a strip of shops, all intended to promote everyday interaction between residents.

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**Figure 2:** Communal Spaces: Wyndford courtyard, 1967, showing flowerbeds, benches and walkways.<sup>29</sup>



**Figure 3:** Communal Spaces: children playing, overlooked by 15-storey blocks<sup>30</sup>

Tenants' perceptions of these 'communal' aspects of their estate were complex, and often at odds with the designers' intentions. If the designers sought to foster neighbourly interaction,



the boundary between 'inside' and 'outside' regularly featured as a source of tension within tenants' assessments of their new environment. In some instances, this manifested in relation to spatial practices located within blocks. While tenant agreements obligated residents to collaborate in the maintenance of communal spaces, not all tenants participated with equal enthusiasm. According to Mrs Henry, for example, a 60 year old resident of Glenfinnan road, her block was being 'spoilt' by the failure of a certain neighbour to 'take her turn':

My neighbour doesn't take her turn of cleaning outside on the stair and window or the refuse chute. It is a shame that one person can spoil the place. I clean the refuse chute every morning. The caretaker should examine the refuse chutes oftener. The others on the landing are clean and very nice.<sup>31</sup>

More generally, perceptions of external disorder tended to reference practices located outside the block, often in ways that positioned the dwelling interior as a refuge or retreat. A typical example here was that of Mr Benn, who moved from Possilpark to 61 Glenfinnan Road with his wife and 20 year old daughter in 1963. Asked to evaluate the overall significance of his move, Mr Benn stressed the 'privacy' of his new dwelling, leading him to revise earlier concerns about the demographic scale of the development:

I'm more than satisfied. Before we came here we worried thinking we would be falling over people. But we haven't found that. We hardly know our neighbours. You are not falling over people, we like to keep ourselves to ourselves. This door is as private to us as if we lived in a ground floor house. You can come in and out week after week and not see anyone. We appreciate the privacy.<sup>32</sup>

Yet, while Mr Benn emphasised the 'privacy' of his new home in summarising his move as a whole, other questions elicited a more ambiguous sense of the relation between inside and outside. In one response, indeed, the spectre of external 'hooliganism' threatens to penetrate the domestic interior via verbal and physical missiles:

It is a pity, they had two nice little squares planted with roses but they had to brick it up because they were always wasted. We were promised that the area of grass we look out onto would be landscaped. Now it is used for the boys playing football. We can't open our verandah windows because of the language used by the hooligans, many of them don't belong to the scheme. When we told them to play somewhere else we got gun shot pellets through the windows, and we have had another window broken by a golf ball. On Sunday afternoons it is so noisy.<sup>33</sup>

From one perspective, such stories dramatize the tensions between an increasingly assertive 'popular individualism' within working-class life in post-war Britain and the fantasy of working-class communalism embodied in the design, layout and management of mass housing estates such as Wyndford.<sup>34</sup> The self-contained nature of multi-storey living resonated with residents' increasing valorisation of personal autonomy and self-determination, but the integrated character of high rise housing also meant that the 'privacy' dwellings afforded was conditional upon how neighbours used shared spaces in and around blocks. One implication of this was that the tenor of everyday life in multi-storey housing was vulnerable to disruption where even a single tenant elected to transgress spatial norms.

The flipside of this, however, was that tenants also had a shared interest in co-operating to preserve the 'respectability' of their floor or block. Individualist aspirations did not entail insular self-abstraction from social relations, but presupposed collaboration in the maintenance of standards which regulated neighbourly interaction. In this regard, it is important to note that the valorisation of 'privacy' was not necessarily a new phenomenon, but was rather integral to pre-existing cultures of working-class 'respectability' stretching back to the interwar period and earlier.<sup>35</sup> As Mark Clapson has argued in an important survey of English suburban estates, 'privacy was highly valued in itself, but it was also inextricably linked with an appraisal of the desirability or otherwise of associating with neighbours'.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, multi-story flats offered possibilities for seclusion not available within overcrowded tenements, but statements about 'privacy', cleanliness and 'hooligans' were also verbal performances of 'respectability'. Expressing enthusiasm for 'privacy' was here an act of self-positioning which articulated disidentification with 'roughness' and those aligned qualities which marked differences in status and propriety within the 'traditional' working class neighbourhoods so idealised by planners. The vernacular discourse of 'privacy' which organised Wyndford residents' perceptions of neighbours thus enacted a form of boundary-making which extended pre-existing notions of respectability into a new and socially 'un-coded' residential environment. Enacted during a moment of mass residential transition, when established patterns of everyday life were subject to disruption, this extension formed one means by which new residents re-established a sense of social order, a by-product of which was the generation of neighbourly tensions over the regulation of liminal spaces in and around blocks.

At Wyndford, these boundary-making processes were promoted and reinforced by the ways practices of estate management were mobilised to institutionalise communal ‘respectability’. At one level, this ‘paternalistic’ impulse emanated from the SSHA, the chief on-site instrument of which was the team of live-in caretakers whose role it was to ‘supervise the blocks and generally see that the public entrances, services and surrounding grounds are kept in a satisfactory condition’.<sup>37</sup> In the maintenance of residential standards, however, caretakers also collaborated with, and were themselves under the observation of, vocal and active tenants concerned to preserve the respectability of the new estate. Despite having only recently opened, by 1965 Wyndford had already one of the largest and most effective tenant associations in the city, a point noted by Jephcott and her researchers in 1968. Amongst its many and diverse activities, which included organising theatre productions, running weekly trips and having Christmas trees installed at the centre of the estate every December, the association showed a special interest in policing the boundaries of residents’ behaviour, targeting in particular the behaviour of children and youths. As well as liaising with the local police and initiating nightly tenant-led neighbourhood patrols, the organisation established its own disciplinary board, before which offenders could be summoned for chastisement and the meting out of penalties.

Unsurprisingly, such efforts to institutionalise respectability created friction between different groups of residents. While many tenants thought the association was ‘doing their best to make the place respectable’,<sup>38</sup> others found the association’s activities oppressive. As one mother, Mrs Riddle, complained,

They only have kiddies play pens and any boy over age, he isn’t allowed in them, he’s eight. We’ve had a circular telling us that he’s not allowed to play ball anywhere in the surroundings. I think there were 24 booked last week by the Tenants’ Association.<sup>39</sup>

Yet, while efforts to impose order undoubtedly created tensions, the activities of the association could also contribute to the generation of shared meanings and the formation of a collective sense of difference. On the one hand, while residents complained repeatedly about the incidence of ‘hooliganism’ on the estate, such complaints almost always included an attempt to externalise the source of unrespectable behaviour. According to Mrs Walters, for example,



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3 You are afraid to use the stairs because of the Teddy Boys who hang about the stairs at night.  
4 It is not the people who live here, it is the hooligans who are coming from outside. That is why  
5 I'm saying there is not enough police patrol here. We are so surrounded by slums it really is  
6 these tough characters who come in here and cause the trouble.<sup>40</sup>  
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11 On the other hand, practices of boundary-making also co-articulated with diverse forms of  
12 informal and formal neighbourly interaction. Tenant perceptions were structured by an  
13 opposition between privacy and external disturbance, but they also made repeated reference to  
14 everyday encounters with neighbours as a source of locally-specific forms of knowledge.  
15 Having moved from the Anderson redevelopment area in 1965 Mrs Hamilton, for example,  
16 appreciated the privacy of her new surroundings: 'I like the way it is arranged. You are more  
17 private with only two doors on each side to the landing'. Yet while Mrs Hamilton enjoyed her  
18 new-found privacy, she also had regular contact with neighbours: less than an hour before her  
19 interview she had encountered her neighbour in the laundry room downstairs, commenting to  
20 the interviewer that 'she has two wee girls'; and while Mrs Hamilton did not have a private  
21 phone installed within her own dwelling, she knew that 'there are a lot of tenants in the block  
22 with private phones which they would let me use in an emergency'. Moreover, Mrs Hamilton,  
23 a mother of two young boys, also found she was becoming involved in new types of social  
24 activity since moving to Wyndford. While she considered that 'there is not much space for the  
25 kids, where they can go and play without being checked', there was nevertheless 'a good school  
26 built in the scheme', which encouraged parents on the estate to meet for leisure and  
27 entertainment:  
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40 there is the parents club across in the school. I'm in the drama group across in the school. I  
41 never went out much at all in the old house. The tenants association have bus runs for the old  
42 age pensioners.<sup>41</sup>  
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48 In a different way, the perceptions of other tenants suggested a dispersal of social contacts  
49 beyond the walled boundaries of the estate. In some cases, this reflected the maintenance of  
50 pre-existing contacts within the surrounding area, complicating the idea of the estate as a  
51 fortress of respectability within the 'slums' of Maryhill. Mr Smith, for example, left a tenement  
52 in Guthrie Street, Maryhill, for a seventh-floor flat in 1966, a move which afforded him and  
53 his wife more 'privacy': 'we like the privacy, it is like being semi-detached. They are very  
54 soundproof. You don't hear much noise from the neighbours'. Yet while moving had brought  
55 changes in terms of privacy, Mr Smith and his wife 'couldn't wish for nicer neighbours', while  
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their ‘social life’ had remained largely constant: ‘we are in the same area as we were previously so it has made no difference. We are quite happy to be near our friends’.<sup>42</sup>

In other cases, the dispersal of social contacts suggested new spatial foci for routines of sociability. Mrs Kilburn, for example, moved to Wyndford in 1963 with her husband and two young boys.<sup>43</sup> Having lived previously in a modern-build tenement block in Easterhouse, a large post-war scheme on Glasgow’s northern boundary, Mrs Kilburn appreciated the seclusion offered by living high: ‘I love this level, you are away from all the hustle and bustle. You can sit and look at the sky. I wouldn’t mind being higher up’. Yet while Mrs Kilburn liked to escape ‘the hustle and bustle’, her family’s main motivation for moving from Easterhouse was that they ‘wanted back into the city’, largely because of the opportunities it offered for socialising and commercial leisure: ‘we get out oftener. Easterhouse was too far away for the pictures. I get more visitors up here’.

During the early years of settlement, therefore, neither neighbourly tensions nor investments in domestic ‘privacy’ signalled ‘communal breakdown’ on the Wyndford estate. As well as positive investments in the modernising norms embodied in the dwellings themselves, tenant perceptions reveal residents as active participants in a pattern of ‘respectable’ social relations wherein the protection of new ‘privacies’ was finely balanced with multiple forms of formal and informal neighbourliness. Complaints about neighbourly transgression should not be read merely as symptoms of communal division, but as evidence of a micro-politics of residential space essential to the construction of social boundaries. Such boundaries set limits on everyday behaviour and helped generate friction between groups of residents, but they did not preclude neighbourly interaction and reciprocity; rather, they supplied the terms within which neighbourliness was defined and shared understandings of place constructed.

*The Collective Meanings of Decline: negotiating social change on the Wyndford Estate*

Retrospective narratives of place collected in 2015 simultaneously confirm and complicate these early perceptions. On the one hand, memories of Wyndford during the early years tend to stress themes of respectability and neighbourly reciprocity. Initially, when Betty Williamson moved to the estate with her husband in 1971 contact with her neighbours had been limited: ‘at

first, we were all working so, maybe an odd night if you were out doing the landing or something you would see them, but I could have knocked their door at any time'.<sup>44</sup> Eventually, however, these initial contacts evolved into a close network of friends, upon whom Betty could rely for diverse forms of support. In addition to running 'messages' for each other and passing on monthly rent when the SSHA collector called during working hours, neighbours were particularly important when Betty had her daughter some nine years after moving. In part, reciprocity was here a response to financial pressure:

going from my full-time wage to more or less down to near nothing. That's how I ended up having to take a part-time job. It was actually one of the girls in the building, Margaret, like that, she had two wee ones and she was in the same position as me. So, we couldnae afford babysitters and what we done was I got a job from nine o'clock to half past twelve and she got a job half past one to half past four.

**Barry:** Right. So what you did was then...

**Betty :** Kept each others kids.<sup>45</sup>

At the same time, however, contacts forged through routines of mothering also formed the basis of a 'social life' on the estate:

...especially in the summer it was good because, eh, we'd get the paddling pool out and fill out the paddling pool and all the mum's, we'd have been all sitting. So, it was a social life for us as well. You know it was good. It really was.<sup>46</sup>

Such stories proliferate through-out residents' recollections, corroborating an impression of everyday life in which reciprocity and mutuality formed important elements of social relations during the early years of Wyndford's life-span.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, however, the version of the past such stories presents also forms part of a wider communal memory of social change, in which the respectability and neighbourliness of the estate in its early years is contrasted with the absence of these values in the present.<sup>48</sup> Steven Cairns, for example, who had moved to the estate as a child in 1964, recalls how 'worthy' his original neighbours were:

everybody that came to the estate had to be worthy, they had to have a job and they had to have no criminal convictions and they had to be a family. So there was lots of families here. So I remember vividly going to school, getting a lift, stopping off at number ten, chapping the door and Mrs. Hughes would open the door and I'd go to school with her son who was a couple of years older than me. And he would take me to school, just down there, which was in the Wyndford.

By contrast, the present was equated with the disappearance of family life and a lack of trust between neighbours:

If you were to take yourself back in time- summer holidays, there'd be dozens of kids all over the place here, you'd just hear children. All over the place. Nowadays, you'd be lucky if you see any kids out and about in groups, playing, You'd be very lucky if – that's the weirdest change for me. Hardly any children. So that to me says there's not a lot of families here anymore. I also notice that the people that are comin' into the building seem to have some sort of problem. You can see that in their demeanour, you can see that in their physical appearance. Uhm, so – One of the biggest changes, that I noticed, and it affected me, and it's trivial, but it's made a big change, was when the building didn't have a security system at the front, it was just a door you could open, everybody was welcome, when Cube Housing took over the building, or the estate, they put a secure entry system in. – Eh, but what they did was they took away a name board, there used to be a name board at the bottom of the building, with all the names of everybody, the families who lived in all the houses. They took that away. So complete and utter anonymity, right there... So the only people you knew were the people you knew from the past. And now there's no- there's nothing like that now so- and there's also a lot of people comin' and going, so there's no stability with neighbours anymore. No trust. No trust left. And that's what's gone.<sup>49</sup>

In the 1960s, the Wyndford estate afforded residents both new opportunities for 'privacy' and the means to re-establish pre-existing patterns of 'respectable' neighbourliness. Given the integrated character of multi-storey housing, however, the reproduction of these spatial norms was always conditional upon neighbourly co-operation. Consequently, significant changes in the composition of the estate's population could have major effects on the temper of neighbourhood life, destabilising the networks and identities established during the early period of settlement. At Wyndford, such population changes have been pronounced: where the estate had originally been designed to accommodate the needs and desires of the post-war family, by 1994 some 67% of dwellings were inhabited by single persons, with just under 7% being occupied by a parent(s) with children under 16. By 2009, both of the estate's two primary schools were closed due to falling numbers and government cuts, provoking a series of protests by residents.<sup>50</sup>

For Wyndford's long-term residents, these changes in the estate's population are routinely identified with 1980s and 90s. According to this collective memory of 'decline', prior to this period Wyndford was a 'respectable' community, in which social relations were stable and close-knit. Thereafter, the conversion of the SSHA to Scottish Homes in 1981, signalling the beginning of a period of extensive stock transfer within Glasgow's public housing sector, is

held to have transformed management practices on the estate.<sup>51</sup> For long-term residents, while stock transfer has coincided with a degree of physical refurbishment, it also marks the advent of managerial indifference to their preferences and rights, exemplified in the introduction of indiscriminate letting procedures which, it is asserted, have ‘let in the undesirables’ and ruptured the estate’s social fabric.

This collective story of ‘decline’ performs a complex function in articulating residents’ evolving emotional relationship to place. According to Keith Kintrea, access to ‘social housing’ in Glasgow after 1981 was indeed increasingly governed by a points-based system which favoured ‘deprived’ or ‘excluded’ groups.<sup>52</sup> Yet, while collective memories of ‘decline’ are certainly shaped by experiences of these changes, there is also a sense in which this narrative idealises the ‘old’ values absent in the present, in the process simplifying a more complex history of shifts in the status of the estate. In part, these shifts can be related to the generalised popular reaction against multi-storey flats instigated from the late 1960s.<sup>53</sup> Beginning with reactions to the Ronan point disaster in 1968, in which a gas explosion killed four high rise dwellers in Newham, the period witnessed a proliferation of tenant protests in cities across Britain, Glasgow included. Launched in a bid for local authority redress, these campaigns fed into wider narratives of ‘urban crisis’ and modernist failure in the 1970s, stimulating a whole social scientific industry devoted to exposing the myriad problems encountered by residents on new estates.<sup>54</sup> Over the course of the period, this would evolve from documentation of the technical and administrative problems reported by tenants to strident disavowals of the flatted estate as a space of ‘social and psychological deprivation’, an approach reaching its apogee in Alice Coleman’s influential 1985 study, *Utopia on Trial: Vision and Reality in Planned Housing*. According to this seminal intervention, Britain’s ‘urban crisis’ was rooted in the design fantasies of post-war architects, who, in inflicting modernist housing solutions on the British population, had stimulated the growth of crime and alienation in Britain’s architecturally deformed inner cities.

Studies such as *Utopia on Trial* undoubtedly captured important tensions in the design of modernist flatted housing. In particular, Coleman’s deployment of Oscar Newman’s famed concept of spatial ‘defensibility’ indicated how the ambivalent status of semi-public spaces in and around blocks could create special problems of residential ownership and control. At the

same time, however, the growing popular hegemony of these ideas also helped obscure, while reinforcing the effects of, a range of other factors contributing to the destabilisation of social relations on flatted estates from the moment of their creation. Most obviously, the production the 'towerblock' as an intrinsically flawed housing form has displaced attention away from the complex relationship between the socio-economic profile of many flatted estates and their rapid degeneration. While Glasgow's multi-storey production drive represented a genuine attempt to modernise the living conditions of its working class citizens, its coincidence with the renewal of inner-city slum clearance was strategic; building on gap sites as well as within designated 'comprehensive development areas', the Corporation sought to exploit the speed of industrial building techniques and the vertical form of multi-storey housing to accommodate the population displaced through rapid slum clearance. As a result, since Glasgow's lowest income tenants were over-represented within these clearance areas, so they were also disproportionately represented within the new high rise population, a process reinforced by the out-migration of skilled and white-collar workers to New Towns as part of Scotland's regional strategy of industrial relocation.<sup>55</sup> As Jephcott's *Homes in High Flats* study thus indicated, less than 6% of employed adults within Glasgow's high rise population fell within the categories of 'professional' or 'foremen and supervisors', with 'skilled manual' accounting for 25%, 'semi and unskilled manual' for 28%, 'junior non-manual' for 15%, and 'personal service' for 23%.<sup>56</sup>

One implication of this clustering was that the new housing developments were especially vulnerable to changing economic conditions. As well as rising rents, the economic position of Glasgow's council tenants was heavily impacted by the restructuring of the city's economy, a process which began to accelerate from the late 1960s as Glasgow's staple industries contracted and new industry was diverted to New Towns.<sup>57</sup> As the 1971 census data showed, the social effects of these processes, registered in rates of out-migration, rising rebate levels and growing unemployment, were most concentrated in the city's inner-zone, with Maryhill, whose canal-side industries were already redundant by the early sixties, amongst the worst affected areas. Indeed, by 1978 Wyndford itself had been designated an 'area of multiple deprivation' as part of an area renewal strategy,<sup>58</sup> and by 1985 some 27% of working-age tenants on the estate were unemployed,<sup>59</sup> rising to 43% in 1994, with almost 75% of all tenants in receipt of either full or partial housing benefit.<sup>60</sup>



A second implication of the concentration of Glasgow's poorest tenants within the city's new high rise housing was that the behaviour and status of new flatted populations quickly became the object of a critical public gaze. As John Welshman has convincingly shown, while post-war welfarism may have transformed the material poverty of working-class neighbourhoods, post-war speculation on changes in working-class life continued to reflect the enduring power of a pre-war tradition of social thought focused on the identification of problematic features of working-class behaviour and the hierarchical classification of sections of the working-class population.<sup>61</sup> In the case of the new flatted developments, the economic background of flatted populations, together with their prior association with Victorian 'slums', helped render them as prominent targets of these kinds of problematizing discourses. Early on, in the 1960s, anxieties focused on tenants' perceived inability to adapt to the transformative effects of 'affluence'. Figured as 'vertical slums of the future',<sup>62</sup> multi-storey flats were initially identified with the adjustment problems of the 'new' working class, reflected in concerns around delinquency, problem families, social atomisation, and abnormal child development.<sup>63</sup> During the 1970s and 80s, however, as the economic fortunes of many estates deteriorated, flatted estates were increasingly reframed as the conventional habitat of a 'new' urban 'underclass' excluded from mainstream affluence. Texts such as *Utopia on Trial*, which participated in this pattern of social-scientific problematisation, here contributed to a crucial process of discursive transposition whereby the stigma of the industrial 'slum' was transferred to the new flatted estates.

In an important sense, therefore, independent of any special technical or design problems on flatted estates, popular perceptions of the social status of such estates were pre-structured by the ways long-established conventions for classifying 'disreputable' sections of working-class were applied to flatted populations, limiting the extent to which such estates could be seen as 'respectable'. This process was reinforced by the effects of accelerating de-industrialisation, but also by changing government imperatives in relation to council housing more generally. Where residents on the Wyndford Estate tend to identify changes in the composition of their estate with 1980s and 90s, during the 60s and 70s public housing provision was already being seen by housing campaigners and government departments as a vehicle for addressing a range of social problems associated with homelessness, vagrancy, ill-health and single-parent

families.<sup>64</sup> During this period, legislative and funding changes to public housing registered a growing political commitment to the repurposing of the tenure as a safety-net service for individuals incapable of house purchase, reflected in incentives to private home-ownership, the transfer of responsibility for housing the homeless to local housing authorities, successive rent hikes which squeezed ‘affluent’ tenants from the tenure, and the expansion of ‘priority needs’ criteria for filtering assess to the tenure.<sup>65</sup> Within this generalised process of ‘residualisation’ the ‘towerblock’ was mobilised publically as the archetypal example of public housing failure, invoked to demonstrate the superiority of private homeownership, but also as a chief means by which the state attempted to address the housing needs of individuals incapable of house purchase. It was in this context, at the behest of both government ministries and housing campaigners, that local authorities initiated the practice of using under-utilised flatted housing to accommodate ‘vulnerable’ groups.

Taken together, the articulation of these mutually-reinforcing economic, spatial and discursive processes help elucidate the role of ‘decline’ as an organising trope within Wyndford residents’ memories of change. On the one hand, the ‘underclass’ discourse which structures external representations of the estate supplies the terms within which long term residents have come to reflect upon change as ‘decline’ and deterioration. As Steven Cairns explained, in the past, in order to be allocated a flat at Wyndford, a resident had to be ‘worthy’: ‘they had to have a job and they had to have no criminal convictions and they had to be a family’. In the 1960s, given full employment and the large number of families on the estate, everyday life could be viewed as in conformity with this ideal. The loss of steady employment in the 1970s, however, together with popular stereotyping of the estate, has impeded residents’ ability to continuously ‘compose’ perceptions of Wyndford in these terms, creating a rift between a valued self-image of residential respectability and how residents have come to view their estate over the long-term.<sup>66</sup> One implication of this is a pervasive sense of loss: Wyndford has ‘slipped’, ‘gone downhill’, ‘declined’ from its original ‘glory days’ as a ‘respectable’ estate.

At the same time, however, a parallel function of memory concerns how loss has been re-negotiated through a process of retrospective reworking. Underclass discourses stigmatise the estate’s they are applied to, but they also inscribe a distinction between neighbours who ‘spread’ the underclass ‘disease’ and those ‘reputable’ residents who are ‘innocent’ victims of

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3 it. For David Cameron, for example, ‘sink estates’ were populated by ‘families’ who ‘build  
4 warm and welcoming homes’, as well as ‘criminals and drug dealers’ operating in the dark  
5 alleyways ‘outside’.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, for Charles Murray, chief exponent of the underclass concept  
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7 in the late 80s, ‘contaminated’ neighbourhoods comprised both victims and villains:  
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10 Britain has a growing population of working-aged, healthy people who live in a different world  
11 from other Britons, who are raising their children to live in it, and whose values are now  
12 contaminating the life of entire neighbourhoods – which is one of the most insidious aspects of  
13 the phenomenon, for neighbours who don’t share those values cannot isolate themselves.<sup>68</sup>  
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18 Long-term residents use this construction to assert difference between themselves and  
19 contagion-spreading newcomers, and thereby, to ‘temporally displace’ the origins of residential  
20 decline. As Thomas Black explained:  
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24 it must have been the nineties maybe, late eighties, early nineties, it started going  
25 downhill...people using drugs, things like that, moving into the flats, as I say, I got tenure with  
26 Scottish Homes and then Cube and that, and because of the Human Rights and all this kind of  
27 stuff, people got moved in where they wanted, that sort of thing. I mean and then, it just brought  
28 the tone down for everybody else, which wasnae very fair. There was people scared to go up  
29 in the lifts and things like that.<sup>69</sup> I mean the flat I stayed in, there was three murders within the  
30 space of, about six months.<sup>70</sup>  
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35 Wyndford’s slide ‘downhill’ was a complex and gradual process, concerning dynamics of  
36 residualisation, de-industrialisation, popular stereotyping and socio-spatial differentiation,  
37 many of which are traceable to the very inception of Glasgow’s ‘high rise revolution’.  
38 However, by equating ‘decline’ with the arrival of newcomers during a later period residents’  
39 memories of change reinterpret the past in order to manage the effects of loss and cultural  
40 othering. By ‘temporally displacing’ the origins of ‘decline’ to a later date damaging  
41 experiences of unemployment and stigmatisation can be redefined, insulating residents from  
42 the implication that they bear moral responsibility for the cultures of ‘idleness’ and ‘welfare  
43 dependency’ which underclass discourses routinely identify with the contagion-spreading  
44 elements of the urban poor.<sup>71</sup> In this way, memory works to preserve a link to an untarnished  
45 respectable past, to a prior golden age that attests to the innate decency of the original residents,  
46 and to the possibility that things could have happened differently had **disreputable outsiders**  
47 **not been ‘moved in where they wanted’.**  
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*The Personal Uses of Decline: individual trajectories and the construction of belongings*

This collective narrative of decline performs a number of different functions at the level of individual understandings of place. Most generally, for many long-term residents, most of whom have little option but to remain on the estate, the narrative supplies a subject-position from which homogenising external representations may be re-addressed, enabling the original ‘community’ to be remembered as ‘decent’, and residential *immobility* to be re-interpreted as a source of belonging rather than evidence of ‘dependency’. Sean Trevor grew up in Wyndford and over the years has been regularly involved in the running of various estate-based clubs and organisations, including the Young Tenants Association, multiple youth clubs and local football teams. While he acknowledges that ‘the Wyndford has slipped a wee bit’ from its early days, he is also angry about how the estate has been treated, not only by the local state, but by the wider media. In particular, Sean was ‘disturbed’ by the way estate life was represented in the recent Peter Mullen film *NEDs*, set in 1975, in which the social life of Wyndford youths centres on the ritualised performance of brutal violence:<sup>72</sup>

it looked as if it’s just like a big jungle...the boys fae the barracks would go down and play the boys fae the valley and instead of fighting with them we would batter lumps out of each other with a ball. We would go out and play football, that’s what we done. Instead of people getting slashed and stabbed and hit with hammers we will try and beat you at football and that’s what we done.

In reaction to such representations and deficient investment in the estate, Sean finally considered ‘enough is enough’, and, during a period when the state was actively encouraging ‘tenant participation’ in new devolved structures of housing management, launched himself into local activism in an effort to secure regeneration and make-over the estate’s negative reputation: ‘I’ve been here most of my life and I thought, no, I live here and sometimes when you are wanting a job done maybe it’s best to do it yourself’.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, emphasising the notion of a ‘big community’, Sean used the interview situation to counter wider public representations of the estate as an ‘area of multiple deprivation’, depicting long-term residence as an asset which differentiated Wyndford from Glasgow’s ‘peripheral schemes’:

it wisnae as if the Wyndford never got these problems that other places like Castlemilk, Easterhouse, Drumchapel or others ended up with. We ended up with them, we got them and we did have a number of young people who have gave their life prematurely, before they should of, but we ended up we never had as much as others and I think that was a good thing about the Wyndford. We ended up we had a big community because most of the people who stayed

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3 in the Wyndford, a lot of them had been there most of their lives so they valued their  
4 neighbors. It ended up my neighbors, not one of the neighbors has been there less than 20 year,  
5 so that's what like the neighborhood is.<sup>74</sup>  
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10 In such extracts, Sean reinterprets the meanings of decline through a separate narrative of  
11 'community empowerment' which portrays residents as actively invested in caring for their  
12 neighbours. Herein, if residualisation has involved the problematisation of tenant  
13 'dependency', this has also engendered a new politics of 'tenant responsibility', one element  
14 of which positions tenants as 'members of a community' required to 'regulate their own  
15 behaviour in accordance with the norms and values of these communities and owing duties to  
16 promote the wider wellbeing of these communities'.<sup>75</sup> While this discourse constitutes tenants  
17 as an object of discipline, it also constructs them as subjects: for Sean, it supplies a framework  
18 within which personal and collective versions of self can be integrated in terms of shared values  
19 of responsibility, mutuality, determination and empowerment – Sean's quest to 'restore the  
20 Wyndford back to its former glory'<sup>76</sup> imbues the self with a sense of personal distinction, but  
21 it is pursued in the service of a larger 'community' of which the self is a part.  
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33 For other residents, however, the themes of decline and community were integrated in subtly  
34 different ways, revealing the importance of personal experiences and circumstances in  
35 mediating changing relationships to place. Julie McMillan moved to the estate with her mother,  
36 father and two sisters in 1964, aged four, and remembers how 'great' her neighbours were,  
37 recalling in particular informal children's concerts modelled on 'the back court concerts'  
38 prevalent within Glasgow's tenements. Staged on the 'drying rows', neighbours provided  
39 'rehearsal space' in the 'pram store' at the bottom of the block, while others made 'cakes and  
40 things' for the live event:  
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48 ...we would invite anybody who lived in our bit or any pensioners who wanted to come and  
49 all we would do...I don't know where we got the planks of wood from, obviously they were  
50 still building a lot in the Wyndford, we would get planks of wood and just put them on bricks  
51 and they would sit on it and we would come out and do our songs.<sup>77</sup>  
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56 As Julie explains, however, 'all those standards that had been upheld all those years started to  
57 slip' during the late eighties and nineties, when the estate was beset by drug and alcohol abuse  
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problems.<sup>78</sup> As part of this ‘slip’, the estate’s social geography has been re-structured around ‘pockets’ of ‘deterioration’, in relation to which her own ‘patch’ is defined. On the one hand, ...the wee bit we have got has been kept nice and people care about it and talk to each other...So if I seen, say Mrs Orr, and she was struggling with her messages or whatever it was, I would be able to go out and say ‘oh do you need a hand’ or whatever. So in that respect I think the old fashioned values are still there.<sup>79</sup>

By sharp contrast, however, the 26-storey blocks, situated on the estate’s southern periphery, represent a space of deviance and danger:

....if I was, honestly, in the street I would rather get a tent and put it out in my garden.

**Barry:** Why?

**Julie:** The 26. Oh, they are mental. Maddest place you could be.

**Barry:** But why?

**Julie:** Fighting, drugs, people getting thrown out of windows, there was a woman got trapped in the lifts and died, there was a lassie murdered in the flats, it’s just honestly a horrible, I don’t like it, I wouldn’t even go there at night.<sup>80</sup>

Where processes of boundary-making in the 1960s asserted social difference between Wyndford and the ‘slums of Maryhill’, many residents’ perceptions in the present delineate zones of otherness within the estate, indicating new lines of internal social fracture associated with the distinction between long-term residents and members of recently arrived groups. In this, as well new arrivals’ class profile, residents frequently made reference to the estate’s increasing use as a site for housing foreign students and asylum seekers to racially inscribe the distinction between respectable insiders and violent outsiders.<sup>81</sup> For Sean, such divisions are backgrounded in his portrayal of ‘community’ as an inclusive and reciprocal enterprise. For other residents, like Julie, such boundary-making expressed a deep attachment to the small ‘patch’ which her family has inhabited for a life-time, yet could also accommodate newcomers with a shared interest in preserving the integrity of the space. As she explained, while the composition of her ‘patch’ has been transformed by the arrival of diverse ethnic minority tenants since the 1990s, ‘not one of them has caused me any harm or problems or cheek or anything’.<sup>82</sup> As such, echoing the theme of mutual ‘respect’ prevalent within the discourse of ‘tenant responsibility’, Julie considers herself ‘lucky’:



I think if you treat people with respect they will treat you with respect back. That's the way me and my husband were and we have never had any problems, really genuinely we are very lucky.<sup>83</sup>

Other, less 'lucky', residents, however, expressed quite different sentiments. Thomas Black moved into a two-apartment dwelling in Wyndford's tallest flats in 1984 with his girlfriend. At this time, when 'strict' vetting procedures were still in operation, flats within the 26-storey blocks were 'beautiful' and Thomas enjoyed good relations with his neighbours, many of whom were pensioners:

I'd done a lot of work for a lot of the old people at weekends, who's maybe want a bedroom papered or you know something else done. So, I would do a lot of work for them and I didnae charge them a lot of money, just enough for a couple of pints or something like that at the time, or give Phyllis a box of chocolates or something like that. That's... and it was beautiful, absolutely beautifully, the way they were maintained was beautiful.<sup>84</sup>

In a relatively short space of time, however, the flats began to 'go downhill'.<sup>85</sup> As the 26-storey flats had originally been designed to house older people, dwellings within these blocks comprised one and two apartment houses, intended for single people and couples. As these older residents died or moved on, and allocation policies changed, the size of these dwellings made them an obvious choice for the rehousing of single individuals identified by the state as 'deprived' or 'excluded', and in the 1980s the blocks experienced an influx of residents released from mental institutions, prisons, migrant detention centres, and drug and alcohol rehabilitation units. During this period the blocks witnessed a series of brutal murders, drug overdoses and multiple suicides, events which captured the attention of the local press and lowered 'the tone' of the buildings.<sup>86</sup> For Thomas, however, the most distressing aspect of these changes concerned how his shared balcony, an innovation originally intended to generate communality amongst aging residents living on their own, became a conduit of intimidation:

**Thomas:** A guy and a lassie moved in down there and started chapping my veranda door, see it was a communal veranda. Started chapping my door and eh, at first they were friendly and that and then he came in one night and he says, 'I want ye to keep that door opened, so's I can come in and out when I want tae'. It was, terrified. By that time, me and my girl, my wife at the time, had split up anyway.

**Barry:** So you were living on your own at this stage.

**Thomas:** Mm hmm. I was living on my own at that time. I was (pause) terrified. I kept telling the housing, 'I'm scared to go down to the flat', and they were asking why but I didnae want to say nothing in case anything came back to me. Eventually I got a house, maybe a year two

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3 later after that happened, but as I say by then, I was getting (indecipherable word). And he had  
4 a big Alsatian dog, and we all complained about it because it just attacked people, especially  
5 in the lift. And he went to the housing and he came back up in the landing to us, 'It's ok I'm  
6 allowed to have the dog now'. We got missives saying, 'No dogs allowed in the high flats and  
7 that'. They changed the missives and let them bring their dogs in, and now they've got Pitbulls  
8 and Rottweiler's everything.  
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10 **Barry:** So, what happened then, like did you say you wanted to move to a different flat then  
11 or what?  
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13 **Thomas:** I just put in for a house. I says, I was down there twenty-six years, and I kept going  
14 and going and going and pestering them. Then they put me on this on this system – gold band,  
15 silver band, whatever it was- and then because my illnesses I've got sciatica and, eh, I got quite  
16 high in the list and then eventually got Kirkhill Place in 2009, I moved in there.<sup>87</sup>  
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21 While Julie has been 'lucky' with her neighbours and remains deeply attached to her 'patch',  
22 Thomas has had a very different experience. Where Thomas had been on good terms with the  
23 pensioners in his block when he first moved in, the arrival of new tenants was a 'terrifying'  
24 experience, producing constant anxiety and ultimately forcing Thomas to move. Yet Thomas's  
25 narrative is not only about victimization; it is also an ironic reflection upon unfairness. As well  
26 as a victim, Thomas constructs himself as a 'responsible' and 'deserving' tenant: when he first  
27 moved in he routinely helped his pensioner neighbours, never charging them 'a lot of money';  
28 he obeyed tenant regulations on pets; and he is finally allocated a new flat because of points  
29 accumulated on the 'Gold Scheme', a tenant reward system for good behaviour. The function  
30 of this self-positioning is not only to emphasise difference between himself and the disreputable  
31 tenants who have 'brought the tone down for everybody else', but to highlight the contradiction  
32 between his performance of 'responsibility' and the ineffectual and inconsistent role of the  
33 housing association. The new politics of tenant conduct here positions housing managers and  
34 tenants alike as 'members of a community': if tenants are expected to show 'respect' to  
35 neighbours, housing associations, now subject to stricter regimes of audit and assessment, are  
36 also evaluated on their ability to manage community relations. Thomas's message is that, while  
37 he has discharged his obligations as a 'responsible tenant', Cube, and the housing regulator  
38 more generally, have not held up their end of the community contract. Thomas's narrative thus  
39 performs a subversive function: where Sean Trevor embraces the themes of community and  
40 neighbourly responsibility, Thomas rejects these as realisable social values:  
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57 I mean you look about you and you just say to yourself, 'No, if I had money I wouldnae stay  
58 here'. You know what I mean? But as I say, I'm okay here and I've got a lot of nice neighbours  
59 up my flat. A lot of undesirables but you've got to live with it. They're everywhere now  
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3 anyway, so, there's nothing you can do about it. Just keep yourself to yourself and don't bother  
4 anybody.<sup>88</sup>  
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### 11 **Conclusion: subjectivity and the social history of the post-war flatted estate**

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14 Negative portrayals of Britain's 'high rise revolution' typically assume a convergence between  
15 the perspective of the high rise dweller and the views of contemporary public critics. In the  
16 dominant historiographical view, one reason why multi-story housing 'failed' was because the  
17 clinical, austere design of flatted developments impeded the 'regrowth of unrooted  
18 communities'. A case study of the Wyndford estate suggests some of the problems with this  
19 blanket assumption. The tendency here of contemporary critics to idealise the 'traditional'  
20 communality of working class life represented a significant misunderstanding of how  
21 discourses of working-class respectability mediated residents' perceptions and uses of  
22 domestic space. By comparison with everyday life in Glasgow's tenements, multi-storey flats  
23 on the Wyndford Estate did appear to offer residents new forms of privacy and seclusion: a  
24 common refrain amongst high rise dwellers was 'we enjoy the privacy'. However, while critics  
25 often equated 'privacy' with communal decay, for residents the term denoted a home-centred  
26 form of domesticity difficult to practice in Glasgow's overcrowded tenements and actively  
27 aspired to by new flat dwellers. In fact, the main source of communal tension on the Wyndford  
28 Estate during the 1960s concerned perceived threats to the 'respectability' of the estate deriving  
29 from neighbours' failure to 'respect' the 'privacy' of others.  
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45 This feature of residents' responses to their new environment is significant for a number of  
46 reasons. Firstly, where contemporary critics worried about the individualising effects of  
47 excessive home-centeredness, complaints about neighbourly transgression allude to a different  
48 kind of problem: defensibility. Flats offered residents new forms of privacy, but the  
49 maintenance of such privacies were dependent upon neighbourly co-operation. One  
50 implication of this was that changes in the composition of an estate's population could have  
51 major effects on the temper of neighbourhood life. A common theme that emerges in many  
52 retrospective narratives of long-term residence concerns the 'invasion' of blocks by 'bad  
53 neighbours' who disrupted established practices and 'brought the place down'.  
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A different implication, however, was that privacy and reciprocity co-existed in a delicate balance on the Wyndford Estate, at least during its early years. Complaints about neighbourly transgression should not be read merely as symptoms of communal division but as evidence of a micro-politics of residential space essential to the construction of social boundaries. Such boundaries set limits on everyday behaviour and helped generate friction between groups of residents, but they did not preclude neighbourly interaction and reciprocity; on the contrary, they supplied the terms within which neighbourliness was defined and shared understandings of place constructed. In this regard, there is an important sense in which, contrary to the anxieties of contemporaries, the Wyndford development enabled the selective retention of aspects of the city’s industrial tenement culture, alongside redefined forms of privacy.

These features of everyday life were not, however, destined to endure indefinitely. According to the social disintegration thesis, the social degeneration of flatted estates was an *inevitable* consequence of design failure: flatted estates were *bound* to ‘fail’ given intrinsic flaws in their design and layout. Close analysis of the changing perceptions of Wyndford residents, however, suggests a multi-dimensional story of social change in which micro-spatial dynamics interacted in complex ways with wider social-historical trends. While the integrated nature of multi-storey housing certainly rendered the delicate balance of social life on the Wyndford vulnerable to changes in the social composition of the estate, such changes were contingent upon the overlapping effects of shifting policy objectives, population processes, cultural stigmatisation, and economic re-structuring. Perhaps most importantly, residents’ narratives register the mutually reinforcing effects of a long-run process of social residualisation, whereby the Wyndford has been progressively re-purposed as special needs housing, and a much wider devaluation of council housing and multi-storey flats within post-war British culture. More than intrinsic ‘design flaws’ or physical degradation, these interlocking processes account for the narrative of ‘decline’ which organises residents’ interpretation of social change on the Wyndford Estate.

Nevertheless, this narrative of ‘decline’ was not a literal description of the causes and effects of historical change on the Wyndford Estate. Where design failure arguments typically rely on quantitative uses of social survey data, a focus on residents’ storytelling allows close attention

to the form of residents' narratives and the ways in which this is shaped by the processes of collective and personal memory. What this reveals is that residents' narration of the history of their estate embodies a negotiation of the emotional effects residential change. On the one hand, the memory of 'decline' which frames collective understanding of the estate's historical trajectory registers *disparity*, not continuity, between past and present; it expresses loss for what has been, and reflects long-term tenants' ongoing difficulty in reconciling a past self-image of residential respectability with the lived realities of social change.

On the other hand, the expression of loss was not the only function performed by memories of decline. The idealisation of a respectable past within residents' memories was not symptomatic of uncritical nostalgia, but a creative subjective response to change, operating in the service of what Popay et al. term a 'negotiated' form of belonging:

Each individual can be argued to arrive at a 'negotiated settlement' between the normative aspects of place, where they 'ought' to live, and their lived experience of place – with the term 'settlement' denoting the best that can be achieved at a particular time rather than a necessarily desirable state.<sup>89</sup>

Long-term Wyndford residents were acutely aware of the problems on their estate and how these shaped the perceptions of outsiders. Yet, since moving was not a realistic possibility for most of these residents, belongings were constituted through a process of negotiating the tensions between ideal and reality. At a communal level, this was effected through a collective negotiation of the relation between past and present: as well as a vehicle for the expression of loss, the narrative of 'decline' was also a mechanism of displacement and projection by which residents reinterpreted change to preserve a memory of 'respectable' origins that enabled place to serve as a site of identification in the present. At the individual level, these processes became increasingly complex as the meanings of collective memory were adapted to make sense of differentiated lived trajectories, making visible the articulation of plural narratives of place and a complex texturing of the forms of 'negotiated settlement'. At both scales, however, narrative production was underpinned by an attempt to fashion, by reconciling the contradictions between lived reality and an ideal image of place, an understanding of one's residential history which could be lived with in relative psychic comfort. In this regard, where dominant representations of multi-story living portray high rise dwellers as passive victims, attention to the processes of memory in structuring understandings of place reveals the active role of

residents in managing and transforming the emotional effects of social decline through the creative re-imagining of the past.

The experiences of Wyndford residents thus have wider implications. A case study of a single estate cannot overturn the ‘design failure’ metanarrative, but it can subject the theoretical premises of this narrative to more rigorous empirical testing, using new interpretative tools to open alternative ways of assessing how residents experienced flatted estates. A case history of the Wyndford Estate does not present a counter-narrative of ‘design success’, but unsettles sweeping generalisations regarding the inevitability of ‘failure’, the causal primacy of ‘design flaws’ in determining social change, and the passive suffering of alienated high rise dwellers. In place of these assumptions, it suggests the need for further research which assesses locally-specific trajectories of ‘decline’, focusing on the interplay between micro-spatial dynamics, wider social-historical trends, and the self-representational practices of residents. In this way, the Wyndford story alludes to the possibility of a more complex and diverse social history of the British flatted estate with the potential to re-situate ‘the towerblock’ within the popular memory of post-war reconstruction.

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**Notes and References**

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Battery Farms in the Sky’, *Daily Mail*, 15 June, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> ‘The Peter Hitchens Column’, *Mail on Sunday*, 18 June, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Important revisionist accounts of public housing include Judy Attfield, ‘Inside Pram Town: a case study of Harlow house interiors’, in J Attfield and P Kirkham (eds) *A View from the Interior*, London, 1989; Mark Clapson, *Invincible Green Suburbs, brave new towns: social change and urban dispersal in postwar England*, Manchester, 1998; Miles Glendinning and Stefan Muthesius, *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland*, New Haven, 1994; Ben Jones, *The Working Class in Mid Twentieth-Century England: Community, Identity and Social Memory*, Manchester, 2012; Ben Rogaly and Becky Taylor,



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<sup>6</sup> Otto Saumarez Smith, 'The Inner City Crisis and the End of Urban Modernism in 1970s Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, 27, 4 (2016), pp.578-598. On the wider meaning of 'crisis' and 'decline' in this period see Robert Saunders, "'Crisis? What Crisis?" Thatcherism and the Seventies', in Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders (eds) *Making Thatcher's Britain* (Cambridge, 2012), pp.25-43; Colin Hay, 'Narrating Crisis: the Discursive Construction of the "Winter of Discontent"', *Sociology*, 30 (1996), pp.253-77; Jim Tomlinson, 'A "Failed Experiment"? Public Ownership and the Narratives of Post-War Britain', *Labour History Review* 73.2 (2008); Jim Tomlinson, *The Politics of Decline: Understanding Postwar Britain*. Routledge, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Otto Saumarez Smith, 'The Inner City Crisis and the End of Urban Modernism in 1970s Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, 27, 4 (2016), p. 581

<sup>8</sup> Saumarez Smith, 'The Inner City Crisis', p.581-582

<sup>9</sup> Academic accounts which reproduce the design failure thesis include Alison Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture: the history of a social experiment*, London, 2003; Patrick Dunleavy, *The Politics of Mass Housing in Britain, 1945-1975: a study of corporate power and professional influence in the welfare state*, Oxford, 1981; Andrew Gibb, 'Policy and politics in Scottish housing since 1945' in Richard Rodger (ed), *Scottish Housing in the Twentieth Century*, Leicester, 1989; Alice Coleman, *Utopia on Trial. Vision and Reality in Planned Housing*, London, 1984. For an opposing perspective which nevertheless eschews examination of residents' personal experiences see Miles Glendinning and Stefan Muthesius, *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland*, New Haven, 1994.

<sup>10</sup> Patrick Wright, *A Journey Through Ruins: A keyhole portrait of British postwar life and culture*, London, 1991, p. 117-133.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Romy, 'The Heygate: Community Life in an Inner-City Estate, 1974-2011', *History Workshop Journal* 81 (2016), p.221

<sup>12</sup> Pearl Jephcott and Hilary Robinson, *Homes in High Flats: Some of the human problems involved in multi-storey housing*, Edinburgh, 1971. University of Glasgow Archives (UGA): DC 127. Study of High Flats. Department of Economic and Social Research, University of Glasgow.

<sup>13</sup> On this wider remaking of 'face to face' community in the post-war period see Jon Lawrence, *Me, me, me? The search for community in post-war England* (Oxford, 2019), esp. introduction

<sup>14</sup> Brewer, 'Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life', p. 97; Ginzburg, 'Microhistory', p.27

<sup>15</sup> D. Massey, 'Places and their Pasts', *History Workshop Journal*, No. 39 (Spring, 1995), pp. 182-192

<sup>16</sup> Phil Hubbard, Lucy Faire and Keith Lilley, 'Contesting the Modern City: reconstruction and everyday life in post-war Coventry', *Planning Perspectives*, 18, 4 (2003), p. 393. More generally, see M Miles, 'Wish you were here', in S. Speir (ed.) *Urban Visions: experiencing and envisioning the city* (Liverpool, 2002), pp. 29-36; R. Rodger and J. Herbert (eds) *Testimonies of the City: Identity, Community and Change in a Contemporary Urban World* (Aldershot, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, the portrayal of Newcastle's multi-storey drive in the classic BBC drama *Our Friends in the North* dir. Peter Jones, Peter James, Stuart Urban, broadcast BBC2 1996.

<sup>18</sup> Irene Mavor, *Glasgow*, Edinburgh, 2000, p. 213

<sup>19</sup> *Notes for the Guidance of Tenants*, Glasgow Corporation, 1966, (GUA) DC127/13/3

<sup>20</sup> (SRO) SSHA, Minutes of the Council of Management, 1960, p.70.

<sup>21</sup> The Survey Report. The First Quinquennial Review of the Development Plan, 1960. Glasgow Corporation, p. 119

<sup>22</sup> (UGA) 'Homes in High Flats' collection, DC127/22, Box 22B

<sup>23</sup> Transcript of Mrs Johnstone, (UGA) DC127/9/1

<sup>24</sup> Transcript of Mrs Robertson, (UGA) DC127/9/1

<sup>25</sup> Mathew Hollow, 'Governmentality on the Park Hill Estate: the rationality of public housing', *Urban History* 37.01 (2010), p.123; Moran, 'Imagining the street in post-war Britain', *Urban History* 39.01 (2012), pp. 166-186

<sup>26</sup> 'Wyndford Flats: Maryhill takes to a spot of high living', *Glasgow Herald*, 12 September, 1967.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> *Scottish Special Housing Association Tenant Brochure* (1962), 6. (GUA) DC127/13/1

<sup>29</sup> UGA) 'Homes in High Flats' collection, DC127/22, Box 22B

<sup>30</sup> UGA) 'Homes in High Flats' collection, DC127/22, Box 22C

<sup>31</sup> Transcript of Miss Henry, UGA DC127/4/1

<sup>32</sup> Transcript of Mr Benn, (UGA) DC127/1/1

<sup>33</sup> Mr Benn.

<sup>34</sup> On the importance of individualism in the remaking of working class subjectivities in post-war Britain see the recent article by Robinson et al., 'Telling Stories in Post-war Britain: Popular Individualism and the 'Crisis' of the 1970s', *Twentieth Century British History*, 28, 2 (2017), pp.268-304. On post-war individualism more generally, see Mike Savage, "Working-class identities in the 1960s: Revisiting the affluent worker study." *Sociology* 39.5 (2005), 929-946; Mathew Thomson, *Psychological subjects: Identity, culture, and health in twentieth-century Britain*, Oxford 2006.

<sup>35</sup> On 'privatism' as a feature of long-run change between the 1920s and 60s see Jon Lawrence, 'Class, "Affluence" and the study of everyday life in Britain, c.1930-64', *Cultural and Social History* 10, 2 (2013), 285. On the issue of privacy within discourses of respectability see Mike Hepworth, 'Privacy, Security and Respectability: The Ideal Victorian Home', in Chapman and Hockey, eds, *Ideal Homes?* (London, 1999), pp. 17-29. More generally, for analysis of the socio-spatial uses of categories of 'respectability' and 'roughness' within Victorian working class neighbourhoods see A Davin, *Growing Up Poor: Home, School and Street in London, 1870-1914* (London, 1996).

<sup>36</sup> Clapson, 'Working-class Women's Experiences of Moving to New housing Estates in England since 1919', *Twentieth Century British History*, 10.3 (1999), pp. 345-365

<sup>37</sup> *Scottish Special Housing Association Tenant Brochure* (1962), 5. (GUA) DC127/13/1. On the paternalism and social conservatism of management practices within public sector housing see Alison Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture: the history of a social experiment*, London, 2003, chapter 6. More generally, for the influence of class paternalism within the wider social democratic project see Jon Lawrence, 'Paternalism, Class and the British Path to Modernity', in Simon Gunn and James Vernon (eds) *The Peculiarities of Liberal Modernity in Imperial Britain* (Berkeley, 2011).

<sup>38</sup> Transcript of Mr Bradley, (UGA) DC127/3/3

<sup>39</sup> Transcript of Mrs Riddle, (UGA) DC127/3/1

<sup>40</sup> Transcript of Mrs Walters, (UGA) DC127/1/1

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<sup>42</sup> Transcript of Mr Smith, (UGA) DC127/3/10

<sup>43</sup> Transcript of Mrs Kilburn, (UGA) DC127/1/1

<sup>44</sup> Mrs Betty Williamson (b. Glasgow, 1949) W/06, p.11

<sup>45</sup> Betty, p.17

<sup>46</sup> Betty, p.14

<sup>47</sup> The sharing functions of female support networks is a well-established theme within the literature on working class neighbourhoods for the nineteenth century and inter-war period. See Ellen Ross, 'Survival Networks: Women's Neighbourhood Sharing in London before World War I' *History Workshop Journal*, 15 (1983), pp. 4-27 and Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working Class Women, 1890-1940* (Oxford, 1984)

<sup>49</sup> Mr Steven Cairns (b. Glasgow, 1962; name altered) W/01, p.22

<sup>50</sup> 'Glasgow school sit-in parents make fresh appeal', *Glasgow Herald*, 14 April, 2009; 'Closure to go ahead', *Evening Times*, 15 April, 2009. The figures are taken from a 10% sample survey conducted between 15 and 30 October 1994. Fiona Henderson, 'Wyndford: Formula or Fluke? Revaluating Glasgow's high rise through a study of Maryhill's mixed development', Unpublished Dissertation, Glasgow Mackintosh School of Architecture, 1995, Appendix C, figure 29.0

<sup>51</sup> Kenneth Gibb, 'Transferring Glasgow's council housing: financial, urban and housing policy implications', *European Journal of Housing Policy* 3.1 (2003), pp. 89-114.

<sup>52</sup> Keith Kintrea, 'Having it all? Housing reform under devolution', *Housing Studies* 21.2 (2006), p.198

<sup>53</sup> Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, chap. 32

<sup>54</sup> On the wider production of these narratives of 'crisis' and 'failure' see Otto Saumarez Smith, 'The Inner City Crisis and the End of Urban Modernism in 1970s Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, 27, 4 (2016), pp. 578-598

<sup>55</sup> On the socio-spatial effects of Glasgow's selective overspill policy see Collins and Levitt, 'The 'Modernisation' of Scotland and its Impact on Glasgow, 1955-1979: 'Unwanted Side Effects' and Vulnerabilities', *Scottish Affairs* 25.3 (2016), 294-316. See also Michael Keating, *The City that Refused to Die: Glasgow: The politics of urban regeneration*, Aberdeen, 1988. As Collins and Levitt argue, this policy, implemented as part of a regional strategy of modernisation geared to the relocation of Glasgow's industry and population to New Towns, induced a massive out-migration of skilled workers and young families, resulting in a concentration of manual workers and old people within the city's new peripheral and inner-city estates.

<sup>56</sup> *Homes in High Flats*, Appendix H, p.174

- <sup>57</sup> For a chronology of economic restructuring in Glasgow see John MacInnes, 'The De-industrialisation of Glasgow', *Scottish Affairs*, 11, Spring (1995), 73-95. See also Keating, *The City that Refused to Die: Glasgow: The politics of urban regeneration*, Aberdeen, 1988.
- <sup>58</sup> Glasgow District Council, *Maryhill Corridor Project. Local Plan*. 1978, p. 2
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- <sup>61</sup> For a history of the uses of the 'underclass' discourse in the British context see John Welshman, *Underclass: a history of the excluded, 1880-2000*, London. 2007
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- <sup>65</sup> On the wider development of 'residualisation' see Ben Jones, 'Slum Clearance, Privatization and Residualization: the practices and politics of council housing in mid-twentieth-century England', *Twentieth Century British History* 21.4 (2010), pp. 510-539. For an earlier account, see Peter Malpass, *Reshaping Housing Policy: Subsidies, Rents and Residualization* (London, 1982).
- <sup>66</sup> On the concept of 'composure' see Graham Dawson, *Soldier heroes: British adventure, empire and the imagining of masculinities*. Manchester, 2013, introduction.
- <sup>67</sup> David Cameron, 'Estate Regeneration', *Sunday Times*, 10 January, 2016
- <sup>68</sup> Charles Murray, 'The Emerging British Underclass', *Sunday Times Magazine*, November, 1989.
- <sup>69</sup> Unfortunately it has proven impossible to verify the accuracy of specific instances of violent crime reported by long-term residents at Wyndford. However, official figures do show that crime in Scotland, a disproportionate amount of which occurs in Glasgow, increased throughout the 1970s and 1980s before declining from the early 1990s onwards. The largest component of Scottish recorded crime includes housebreaking and other thefts, while the rate of violent crime in Glasgow has long been much higher than for Scotland as a whole, typically 50-60% higher than the national rate. Sources: Scottish Government (2019) Recorded Crime in Scotland 2018-19, Table 10; [https://www.understandingglasgow.com/indicators/community\\_safety/violence/trends](https://www.understandingglasgow.com/indicators/community_safety/violence/trends) "
- <sup>70</sup> Mr Thomas Black (b. Glasgow, 1959) W/03, p.7-8
- <sup>71</sup> On the functions of 'temporal displacement' within collective memory see A Portelli, 'The Death of Luigi Trastulli: Memory and the Event' in his *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: form and meaning in oral history*, New York, 1991.
- <sup>72</sup> *NEDs* dir. Peter Mullan, 2010.
- <sup>73</sup> Mr Sean Trevor (b. Glasgow, 1963; name altered) W/05, p.12
- <sup>74</sup> Sean p.10-11
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- <sup>81</sup> For further analysis addressing the racialisation of social housing estates in Glasgow see Kearns et al., 'Notorious Places: Image, Reputation, Stigma. The Roles of Newspapers in Area Reputation for Social Housing Estates', *Housing Studies*, 28, 4 (2013), pp. 103-127; John Flint, 'Maintaining an Arm's Length? Housing, Community Governance and the Management of 'Problematic' Populations', *Housing Studies*, 21, 2 (2006), pp.301-334
- <sup>82</sup> Julie p.30
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<sup>84</sup> Thomas, p. 7  
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<sup>89</sup> Jennie Popay et al, ‘A Proper Place to Live: health inequalities, agency and the normative dimensions of space, *Social Science & Medicine*, 57.1 (2003), p.67

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